

Jon Huntsman Jr.
Public Education Plan
Kindergarten – 12th Grade
Executive Summary

Introduction

Building a stronger economy is the key to Utah's future, and the key to funding a quality education for our children and our grandchildren. Utah's youth are certainly one of our greatest assets. We must provide these children with the skills and preparation necessary to meet the needs of an ever complex and competitive world. In order to afford a world-class education for our booming student population, we must expand and diversify our economic base along with the skills needed to fuel it. In getting us there, no task will be more important than that of educating our youth. Here is a summary of my plan for education.

Eight Point Plan for Education

1. Economic Growth to provide for Education Funding - Rebuilding our economy is the only way to ensure that Utah will have enough quality and high-paying jobs. This is also the only way that we will adequately fund our children's educational needs. A sound economic base will be built from the following initiatives: a revised tax structure, improved competitive environment for companies, business recruitment, capital growth, capturing opportunities, promoting tourism, energizing economic development, growth in target industries, and streamlining state government. All these economic initiatives are interrelated with one another. As we generate success in one area, that success will lead to success in other areas. Coordinated implementation will provide for better economic results and additional momentum for Utah. A strong economy is critical to funding our educational needs.

2. Empowering Teachers - We can and should do more to encourage good teachers to stay in the classroom and recruit new teachers into the teaching profession. To do this we must increase teacher pay for those who perform and raise the beginning salary of first-year teachers. In addition, in order to attract college graduates into the teaching profession, we need to offer the incentives like repayable low interest loans, particularly for those who are rural educators, in exchange for teaching in areas of Utah which have difficulty in recruiting educators. Once in the classroom we can empower our teachers by encouraging them to mentor new teachers and share their best practices. In addition we can provide bonuses for innovative ideas; encourage on-going training opportunities and assuring that money for classroom supplies gets to the classroom. Finally, we must get the restrictive parts of the federal *No Child Left Behind* program re-vamped or jettisoned. The results of this federal program thus far have caused an unintended slide in teacher morale that must be reversed. I will negotiate with the Department of Education

to allow local decision making and lessen the mandates now encumbering the classrooms.

3. Focus on Early Education - Kindergarten to Third Grade - Studies show if a child is reading at grade level by fourth grade, the child will also be at grade level on other subjects such as math and science. Efforts must be made to get every child reading at grade level. This includes a focus on “English as a Second Language” (ESL) students who may have good verbal skills, but need assistance mastering reading skills. Class size reduction is the key to giving teachers the ability to focus on individual reading needs. In addition, my negotiations on the *No Child Left Behind* act will include using funds to reduce class size to 25 in our Title I schools. I will continue to build on the literacy program started by Governor Olene Walker.

4. Community and Private Sector Involvement (Public Private Partnerships) - Partnerships between public education and the business community are beneficial and should be strengthened as a potential source of revenue. The private sector has developed and continues to develop practices and methods applicable to education, which can be shared with educators and parents. I will launch an unprecedented effort to fully engage the private sector. We will work together to embrace and adopt schools and programs that can become centers of excellence for our students. I will ask students, parents, teachers, school administrators, business and community members to increase volunteer efforts in the classroom. During the 2002 Olympics, we unleashed the power of volunteerism in this state. I fully intend to encourage a similar effort for our schools. Mentoring of teachers, students and administrators through donations of time, funds, knowledge and technology will become a standard for public education in our state.

5. Expanding Public School Choices – We need to remember those parents and guardians who may have a child falling through the cracks due to a learning disability, but cannot afford an alternative. I propose looking at needs based options, which hold public education harmless, while helping those families who need another choice. The Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship bill which would pay fees and tuition for disabled students should be brought back by the Utah Legislature and passed. This legislation will provide an opportunity to assess education choice with Utah schools. Charter schools offer another avenue for parents, teachers and community members to take reasonable risks and create new, innovative, more flexible ways of educating all children within the public school system. Children learn differently and one size does not fit all. As Governor, I will always be open to innovative education initiatives that build teacher morale and improve student performance.

6. Increased Accountability - Increased accountability begins at the school level. School principals need authority over the personnel and operations of their respective schools with the flexibility to help their teachers be innovative. Local decision making allows principals and teachers to take credit for their successes while being held accountable for needed improvements. In support of school accountability, I propose a *Contract with the Classroom* which would require students, parents and teachers to sign a contract establishing the following: the student agrees to be self disciplined, respectful of

the teacher and a mentor to other students; the parents agree to be involved in their child's schooling including reading together, reviewing homework and volunteering in the classroom; and teachers agree to communicate with parents and set goals for the classroom with the Principal. Goals can be reviewed on a regular basis to establish a spirit of cooperation and achievement. Finally, testing is an element of accountability, but we need to assure teachers and students are not working just to pass tests and we are not testing just to pass time. We want students to learn from their teachers the enjoyment of life-long learning.

7. Strengthen the coordination between higher education and K-12 education -

Higher education functions best when it receives well prepared, well informed students from the K-12 system. Historically, this has come about when K-12 and higher education have worked together toward common goals. Students need to make the best use possible of their time in K-12 and particularly in the last years of high school. Innovations include creating multiple diploma levels of high school with entrance to state colleges and universities and higher education faculty delivering college credit courses within the high school setting. With improved integration between the Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT) and K-12, interested high school students can easily move to technical certification. We must ensure eighth and ninth-grade students-and their parents-understand options and entrance requirements with state universities, colleges, and UCAT. Full funding of the Century Scholarship program will encourage able students to complete their first two years of college while still in high school.

8. State Government Accountability to Public Education - In addition to jump starting the economy to fund education, we must look at efficiencies in state government as a means to assure that funds for education are not drained to other areas. Upon taking office, I will immediately implement a flexible hiring freeze on state employees and form a Grace Commission to look at all aspects of state government for cost cutting measures. Finally, I will work very closely with the Utah State Legislature and our congressional delegation to make better use of school trust lands including the APPLE Initiative which seeks to compensate all western states for the amount of federally owned land that is non-taxable.